DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 261 982 SP 026 446

AUTHOR Schambier, Robert F.
TITLE Five Paradoxes in Staff Development and What To Do about Them.
PUB DATE May 85
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the New England Regional Adult Education Conference (Fairlee, VT, May 2-3, 1985).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Inservice Teacher Education; *Program Development; Program Effectiveness; *Program Evaluation; *Staff Development; *Teacher Education
IDENTIFIERS New Hampshire

ABSTRACT

A survey of 800 public school educators in New Hampshire revealed inconsistencies between staff development goals and practices. While teachers and administrators agreed on program goals, they disagreed on how effectively staff development projects meet individual needs. Differences between inservice activities and staff development activities must be clarified, since attempts to satisfy institutional goals are frequently at odds with the pursuit of individual goals. Other paradoxes are evident: (1) while intending to serve experienced personnel who have one or more degrees and a strong background, the programs are generally too elemental; (2) too little attention is paid to outcomes and follow-up activities, resulting in minimal carry-over into the classroom; (3) many needs-assessment procedures are superficial, leading to pursuit of short-range interests over real educational needs; and (4) the minimum expectations established for staff development too often translate into maximum participation for the disinterested. This article proposes that, to become optimally effective in creating change, staff development programs statewide must eliminate the paradoxes that characterize them. (Author/JD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED261982

FIVE PARADOXES IN STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT THEM

Robert F. Schambier, Ed.D.

(Paper Presented at the New England
Regional Adult Education Conference,
May 2 & 3, 1985, Fairlee, Vt.)

By transcending the limited perspective of isolated attempts to improve education through inservice training, we can detect certain paradoxes. Paradoxes, as we know, are seemingly self-contradictory propositions. They frequently impair our ability to think clearly through an issue. In staff development, for example, planners who fail to recognize discrepancies among stated objectives tend to respond to every client need, regardless of its source or validity.

Indeed, Mallan (1978) suggests that decision makers' unbridled attempt to be everything to everyone has them pursuing philodoxy instead of philosophy. Philodoxy, Mallan contends, is the honoring of opinion over the pursuit of wisdom. Not that clients' opinions are generically unsound. Opinions regarding what aspects of staff development to provide are much more likely to be divergent. Frequently they exceed the boundaries of the institution's conceptual framework. When this occurs, opinions no longer relate to the values and goals that the institution has set for itself.

A study of the perceived staff development needs of 800 public school teachers and administrators in New Hampshire reveals that both groups agree on what local programs propose to do (Schambier, 1985). Teachers and administrators disagree, however, on how effectively their programs meet individual needs. The study examined four aspects of staff development: program philosophy and goals, needs assessment procedures, anticipated outcomes, and program processes. An analysis of survey results indicates that five paradoxes characterize local staff development/inservice efforts.

One paradox is that staff development, while built on principles of self-direction, requires many forms of external validation. Some participants consider external validation to be inconsistent with the concept of professional development. In their opinion, monitoring—as it is called—infringes upon the rights of professionals to set their own performance standards and to designate applicable outcomes.

Groteluesehen, Gooler, and Knox (1976) contend that criticisms of this kind usually occur when participants fail to differentiate between preordinate and responsive forms of evaluations. Preordinate evaluations stem from external sources. They include monitoring processes that enable outsiders to compare outcomes against set standards. They provide justification for existing programs, as well as accountability. Since staff development in a growing number of states is mandated for recertification purposes, preordinate evaluations are needed to validate local plans.

SP026446

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

R. Schambier

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

Responsive evaluations, on the other hand, reflect what participants think. As subjective evaluations, they measure how well programs succeed in meeting the needs and expectations of their clients. According to the authors, these two aspects of evaluation are part of a continuum; they supplement rather than contradict one another.

When this paradox surfaces, it is recommended that local officials transmit the necessity for preordinate evaluations to staff development participants. Officials should clarify, among other things, that the value of staff development to the profession rests with external assessments. If educator recertification processes are to retain their credibility, they must measure up to certain criteria of validity. Validity requires, in part, that learner outcomes be assessed independently of personal reactions.

A second paradox is that, while attending primarily to the expressed needs of participants, staff development can fulfill institutional requirements. In theory, most human resource development plans encourage the pursuit of these two goals. Educational objectives, as set by school districts, are supposed to reflect institutional needs. Participants, in turn, select objectives compatible with their individual growth plans.

In practice, however, individual and institutional goals are not always congruent (Clark & Siedman, 1980). As the New Hampshire study indicates, participants generally respond positively to inservice conditions that allow them the greatest freedom of choice. They are less inclined to agree with conditions that favor district needs. Preferred items in the survey included key phrases such as "responsive to my needs," "geared to my level," and "helps me to determine my own goals."

In addition to interests, participants are likely to select activities leading to credential renewal. Those who require periodic recertification or re-endorsement in minor disciplines may often select activities outside their primary assignments. (Re-endorsement pertains to inactive areas or disciplines listed on the original certificate.) When participants seek to maintain or to regain certificate endorsements, institutional needs become secondary. To the extent that preferences prevail in the selection of activities, institutional goals are probably reached more by chance than by design.

Accordingly, program officials are advised to distinguish more clearly between institutional and individual needs. Officials are also advised to develop mechanisms for evaluating the impact upon the district of its staff development program. The New Hampshire study has helped to establish, for example, that some participants have no real incentive for putting recently acquired knowledge to use. Whatever else it may accomplish, staff development does not really fulfill its mission if the knowledge and skills imparted do not translate themselves into instructional/ administrative performance.

As the literature suggests, one way for districts to reconcile differences between individual and institutional goals is to differentiate between staff development and inservice training. By-and-large, staff development is responsive to the needs of participants; inservice training attends to system requirements. Once these distinctions are drawn, staff development officials can determine how much credit to award for successful completion of either kind of activities.

A third paradox in staff development is that minimum standards frequently become optimal standards, as participants develop a work-to-contract mentality. Some educators are not motivated, under existing systems, to exceed basic requirements for credential renewal. Once their personal goals are met, these personnel become indifferent to continually changing institutional needs.

Participants who exceed minimum requirements are sometimes critical because their district fails to acknowledge their level of commitment. These participants contend that program goals are self-contradictory. In theory, continuing professional renewal is encouraged; in practice, individual efforts beyond minimum requirements are disregarded.

Staff development officials should therefore explore ways of acknowledging all approved and successfully completed activities. This change would encourage participants to pursue professional renewal activities on a more constant basis. It would also reduce discrepancies, in some districts, between what participants include in their professional resumes and what district records indicate.

A fourth paradox is that school districts can achieve excellence in professional development by relying on a plethora of basic programs that, in effect, replace graduate studies. Respondent groups in New Hampshire agree that introductory-level activities permeate many local programs. Few sequential programs or intensive studies are offered. Moreover, follow-up activities are seldom offered. According to the survey, respondents with five or more years of experience in education are generally critical of their local program for being too elemental.

While appearing responsive to staff needs, the preponderance of introductory offerings in many programs may be symptomatic of a greater problem. This problem could be a tacit unwillingness by some school districts to become more involved in professional development than state legislation requires. Comprehensive programs, for example, require many resources. Two resources in particular are noteworthy.

The first is money. Quality staff development programs need adequate funding, a limited resource in public education. Funds are needed to assess real faculty needs and to provide attending services. Districts committed to quality programming must bridge the gap between theory and practice. They frequently find, however, that change is both costly and complex. As a result, some districts may default by endorsing the spirit of staff development without implementing its findings.

The New Hampshire study did not assess school district levels of commitment to staff development. It presumes that all districts are equally concerned with professional growth. The investigation of varying levels of commitment among school districts remains for future study.

Another resource is consultant availability. Many districts depend largely on internal personnel to conduct staff development activities. These personnel may have useful expertise to share with their colleagues. They may be familiar with district goals and objectives. They may also be able to design practical and enriching experiences.

One limitation of internal consultants, however, is that they help foster a closed system. Districts relying mostly on a "by-teachers-for-teachers" approach may work against their own goal, which is to explore new ways of contibuting to student learning. They may create what Bobbitt et al. (1978) call a climate of pooled interdependency. In this climate, participants become suspicious of larger social systems and begin to resist change increasingly. At length, insularity begins to interfere with institutional growth.

Accordingly, districts interested in improving the quality of staff development should assess their own levels of commitment to inservice education. To the extent that the New Hampshire study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on training professionals, the reader may draw the following conclusions on program planning.

1. Districts should be prepared to provide external consultants and programs intended to create new faculty awarenesses.

2. Districts should collaborate with state departments of education and other agencies to develop a clearinghouse of consultants and research materials.

3. Planners should confer with nearby colleges and universities to design relevant advanced studies.

4. Planners should explore additional means of validating professional learning. Credit could be awarded according to a formula that recognizes demonstrated ability as well as contact time.

5. Districts should encourage participants to put to use the knowledge they have acquired in staff development.

The results of the New Hampshire study reveal that public school teachers and administrators, in general, do not disagree with the goals and purposes of staff development. Both groups concur that the theoretical foundations of staff development are in keeping with their respective expectations. Disagreements do exist, however, on how effectively local plans carry out their mission.

Specifically, many program offerings are considered too elemental for a growing body of experienced personnel. Educators with several years of experience in their present position, as well as in education, find that their needs are not fully met within existing plans. Many program offerings are not rigorous enough to strengthen professionals for the exigencies of the workplace.

Other educators find that local programs pay too little attention to outcomes. Training activities are either too sporadic or too isolated to have any carry-over into the classroom or administrative office. As a result, the client's sense of achievement is short-lived. Payback is not commensurate with the effort invested in training.

Finally, staff development processes are considered the most paradoxical of all. If staff development proposals were evaluated on outcomes rather than stated intent, many programs would incur additional criticisms. Respondents are also critical of cumbersome record-keeping procedures. Officials charged with supervising local operations -- including approval and review procedures -- complain about "tedious paperwork." This widespread criticism of staff development processes suggests, among other things, that planners need to align methods and purposes.

The risk of overgeneralizing the results of a local study is always present in a summation. The New Hampshire study of the perceived staff development needs of public school personnel allows the following conclusion, however. The 1980s are a time to redefine the role of educational staff development. To effect reform in public education, teacher trainers may want to supplement panoramic and basic approaches to inservice training with programs more responsive to expressed needs. These needs must also be sifted through the philosophical screen of the institution. In education as in business or industry, division of labor is a necessary but insufficient condition for effectiveness. Without a proper conceptual framework, the staff will vacillate between one or another theory until complacency sets in.

Effective staff development is neither elitist nor egalitarian. It merely encompasses the total needs of the institution. It begins by considering what the institution hopes to accomplish. Then it provides awarenesses and competencies that individuals need (at differentiated levels) to function productively within the system. Therein lies the fifth paradox; namely, that treating everyone equally requires increased attention to individual differences.

References

Bobbitt, H. R., Jr., Breinholt, R. H., Doktor, R. H., & McNaul, J. P. Organizational behavior: Understanding and prediction. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1978.

Clark, R. J., & Siedman, E. Individual imperatives in institutional self development. Peabody Journal of Education, October 1980, 58 (1), 34-38.

Grotelueschen, A. D., Gooler, D. D., & Knox, A. B. Evaluation in adult basic education: How and why. Danville, Ill.: The Interstate Printers & Publishers, 1976.

Mallan, J. T. Philodoxy: The promise of inservice. Theory Into Practice, June 1978, 17, 218-228.

Schambier, R. F. Perceived staff development needs of public elementary and secondary school teachers and administrators in New Hampshire. Doctoral dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1985.